NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5465
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UNRO AND DISASTER RELIEF

ANNCR:

WITH INCREASING EFFICIENCY AND GROWING INTERNATIONAL ACCEPTANCE, A SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE WORKING IN THE CHEERLESS CELLAR OF THE SPRAWLING UNITED NATIONS EUROPEAN HEADQUARTERS IN GENEVA ARE CARRYING OUT A SERVICE WHICH CAN MEAN A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH. THESE FIFTEEN PEOPLE WORK FOR THE UNITED NATIONS DISASTER RELIEF ORGANIZATION -- UNRO, FOR SHORT. RICHARD KILLIAN HAS DETAILS IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE OPERATIONS OFFICE, WITH ITS WORLD MAP, CLATTERING TELETYPE MACHINES, AND A BANK OF CLOCKS IS SANDWICHED BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS GENEVA STAFF LIBRARY AND THE MEDICAL SERVICE. TO THE VISITOR, THERE IS NO SENSE OF DISASTER IN THIS MODEST ROOM. BUT THERE IS A SENSE OF EXPECTANCY HEIGHTENED BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT NATURAL AND MAN-MADE DISASTERS OF DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS ARE HAPPENING EVERY HOUR OF THE DAY SOMEWHERE IN THE WORLD. THE WORST INCLUDE KILLER-EARTHQUAKES, CYCLONES, FLOODS, FIRES, INDUSTRIAL DISASTERS AND TRAIN CRASHES. IT IS IN THESE OFFICES WHERE THE IMMENSE HUMANITARIAN RESOURCES OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS ORGANIZED TO LESSEN THE PAIN OF THOSE DIASTERS.

DECEMBER WAS A FAIRLY TYPICAL MONTH AT UNRO, WITH TWENTY EARTHQUAKES OF SERIOUS PROPORTIONS REPORTED. THE WORST WAS IN IRAN ON DECEMBER TWENTIETH, KILLING FIVE HUNDRED TWENTY-

ONE PEOPLE. THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT DID NOT REQUEST UNRO'S HELP ALTHOUGH IT WAS OFFERED.

ONE MONTH EARLIER, THE CYCLONE WHICH STRUCK ANDHRA PRADESH AND TAMIL NADU STATES IN INDIA CAUSED THE GREATEST NUMBER OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION FROM A NATURAL CATASTROPHY IN RECENT YEARS -- A MINIMUM OF TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND PEOPLE DIED, UNRO SAYS. IN THAT CASE, UNRO WAS CALLED IN FOR INITIAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

UNRO IS A SIX-YEAR OLD CREATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL. ITS AIM IS TO PREVENT DUPLICATION IN THE PROCUREMENT AND EXPEDITION OF RELIEF SUPPLIES. IN FACT, IT IS A HUMANITARIAN AID CLEARING HOUSE. IN UNITED NATIONS LANGUAGE, IT IS CALLED A FOCAL POINT FOR COORDINATING RELIEF. BUT EQUALLY IMPORTANT IS THAT FACT THAT IT IS PART OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM. MANY NEW NATIONS FIND IT EASIER TO ACCEPT HELP CHANNELED THROUGH THE UNITED NATIONS RATHER THAN DIRECTLY FROM ANOTHER NATION OR VOLUNTARY AGENCIES CONNECTED WITH A PARTICULAR SOCIAL OR POLITICAL SYSTEM.

ONCE A DISASTER STRIKES AND ANY UNITED NATIONS BODY RECEIVES REQUEST FOR HELP, UNRO AUTOMATICALLY TAKES OVER THE RELIEF COORDINATION. IT SENDS AN EXPERT TO THE STRICKEN AREA, WHO WITHIN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS SENDS A LIST OF PRIORITY NEED TO GENEVA HEADQUARTERS. A SITUATION REPORT GOES THROUGH THE UNITED NATIONS COMPUTER LOCATED IN THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION IN GENEVA TO OVER ONE HUNDRED KNOWN DONOR COUNTRIES AND VOLUNTARY RELIEF AGENCIES. REPLIES ARE SWIFTLY SORTED OUT -- WHETHER THEY BE FOR BLANKETS, TENTS,

MEDICINES, MONEY, EMPTY AIR CARGO SPACE, MEDICAL TEAMS OR FOOD. UNRO ESTABLISHES THE SWIFTEST, AND HOPEFULLY, THE MOST ECONOMICAL RELIEF ARRANGEMENT OUT OF THOSE OFFERS. FROM THEN ON, WITH SUPPLIES FLOWING, UNRO MONITORS THE RELIEF OPERATION UNTIL THE CRISIS HAS PASSED AND THE GOVERNMENT INVOLVED CAN TAKE OVER.

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